

Volunteers Tackle Walls, Windows, and Weeds

Boy Scouts and leaders, college faculty and students, and other volunteers joined Bureau of Land



Management (BLM) staff for the 18th annual celebration of National Public Lands Day on September 24. Beautiful blue skies and pleasant fall temperatures created the perfect day for these hardworking volunteers to enjoy a day in America's Great Outdoors while restoring a piece of Arizona history. The morning was devoted to the cleanup and renovation of a historic ranch house, barn, and grounds at the Ninemile Ranch.

Following a safety briefing, Safford Field Office park ranger Scott Ford presented a brief history of the ranch, which became public lands in 2004 to provide access to the Dos Cabezas Mountains Wilderness. These 640 acres were acquired from Phelps Dodge Mining Company in 2004 as partial exchange for lands now part of Freeport-McMoRan's Safford Mine.



Burns Blanton, quarter horse breeder and trainer, built the ranch in 1928. In 1936, the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) was established with Blanton as one of the original members. That same year, at Ninemile Ranch, Blanton bred the horse Lucky Blanton, which went on to be one of the most famous working roping horses of all times and a foundation stallion for the AQHA.

Volunteers then broke into workgroups to focus on specific projects.



A major cleanup effort took place in the old barn, where Scouts removed scrap metal, rotting wood, and other debris. The barn is a visually appealing old structure constructed of railroad ties, now weathered, carefully meshed together with mortis and tenon joints.



Another group of volunteers from Eastern Arizona College concentrated their efforts on window screens. Wooden frames were scraped of flaking paint and given a fresh coat of white paint. Meanwhile other Scouts and BLM staff tackled exterior door and window frames.





Scouts armed with rakes and shovels worked on the grounds around the house and barn to clear weeds. Removal of this vegetation will create a defensible space around these structures, reducing potential damage from wildfires in the area.



Meanwhile, two other groups reconstructed a block wall surrounding the house. The large tufa stone blocks were actually much lighter than they appeared. Scouts and leaders lifted fallen blocks back into place and secured them with cement.



After completing work in the barn, volunteers removed an old chicken coop that had collapsed and was completely in ruins. All the metal removed from the barn and outbuildings was taken to Safford to be recycled.

Some Scouts took advantage of the opportunity to explore the adjoining Dos Cabezas Mountains Wilderness after completing their project. Scrambling up a hillside of giant boulders, the boys got a great workout in the fresh air on this perfect September morning. This kind of exercise and the volunteer labor throughout the morning are exactly what are promoted through the *Let's Move Outside* program, and this project was one of 121 BLM projects to be recognized by *LMO* on a national basis.



With all their work done by 11:00 a.m., volunteers gathered inside the ranch house. Assistant Field Manager Tom Schnell thanked the group for spending the day improving their public lands. "Our focus today has been to restore a piece of local history," he said. "In Arizona, many events throughout this year are leading up to the February 2012 celebration of Arizona's 100th anniversary, the Statehood Centennial. Helping to restore the Ninemile Ranch is a great way to honor Arizona's heritage."

A tasty lunch and drinks were enjoyed courtesy of the Public Lands Foundation. NPLD t-shirts were provided by the National Environmental Education Foundation. Each participant was also given a BLM wilderness pin, water bottle, one-day free pass to federal recreation areas, and other gifts.



Before heading home, volunteers posed for one last photo to celebrate their accomplishments and day of hard work and fun at the Ninemile Ranch. These volunteers had just removed over a ton of metal and 1,500 pounds of wood and other debris from the project site!

*Story and Photos by Diane Drobka
BLM Public Affairs Specialist, Safford Field Office*